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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of volunteers in a rural primary school and their effects on teacher use of time and student behavior in the classroom. A survey was completed by 45 teachers and other personnel at Allendale Primary School in rural central Virginia. The school had 58 volunteers, of whom 38 volunteered on a weekly basis averaging 112 hours per week. Ninety percent of volunteers were parents. Volunteers chaperoned trips, helped with nonroutine events such as career days, tutored individual students or small groups, helped with enrichment activities, provided instructional support such as grading papers, and provided clerical or library support. About 52 percent of staff felt that having a volunteer increased planning time, and 76 percent felt that having a volunteer increased instructional time. All specialists and over 80 percent of teachers felt that having a volunteer increased the amount of individual time spent with students and produced a positive effect on classroom behavior. Appendices contain the school questionnaire and teacher comments. (SV)

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Running Head: WHAT EFFECT DO VOLUNTEERS HAVE ON A RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL?

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Abstract

Volunteers in the classroom are a promising area of research and an additional tool for teachers to have available as a resource. They can be engaged in activities that range from tutoring students one on one, to performing administrative tasks such as constructing teaching materials, to chaperoning field trips. This study focuses on a rural primary school in central Virginia. Data was gathered on the status of people that volunteered, the tasks that they performed, and the effect that the volunteers had on teacher planning, instruction, and classroom behavior. Information gathered indicates that having a volunteer in the classroom results in increased instructional time and more positive classroom behavior.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Need for Study

As budgets decrease and student/teacher needs increase it becomes necessary to look outside the school system for additional resources. The use of volunteers in school setting can provide a resource without adding additional costs to school budgets.

Studies of volunteer programs in school settings began in the 1950's when twenty New York City citizens offered to initiate an organized volunteer system that provided trained volunteers. This resulted in the 1956 formation of the Public Education Association which began recruiting and training volunteers for the New York City public schools. By soliciting and receiving funds from such corporations as the Ford Foundation, cities across the United States began volunteer programs of their own. These ventures were so successful that in 1968 the National School Volunteer Program was developed, which also was funded by the Ford Foundation (Michael, 1990). These organized volunteer agencies were responsible for recruiting, training, and placing volunteers in their respective schools.

Not all volunteer programs are as organized as the above mentioned, but they all have the same goal: to further the education of

students. Programs come in many shapes and sizes and utilize the abilities of people from many different areas. Initially the majority of the volunteers were parents, predominantly mothers, but as more females enter the work force, school systems are examining other areas for recruitment. University students, senior citizens and retirees, and the marketplace offer a diverse community of volunteers to aid in the classroom.

Volunteer use varies from school to school and classroom to classroom, but all have the benefit of enhancing education. Whether the volunteer program is organized by a central bureau or is teacher oriented and trained, its functions is basically the same. This study will examine how the uses of volunteers affects the classroom.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of volunteers in a rural primary school and explore their effect on teacher attitudes about changes made in teacher planning and instruction, and the effect on behavior in the classroom. It is predicted that there will be increased instructional time and a positive effect on classroom behavior. This may result in increased planning for teachers, which is to be expected if there is increased instructional time.

Origin of Study

I chose to execute my research on volunteers in a rural setting for many reasons. I live in a rural area and I have children that attend a rural school system. As each of my children entered school, I spent an extensive amount of time volunteering in their classrooms. This allowed me to receive first hand knowledge on how a variety of teachers employed the use of volunteers. As a volunteer, I was able to perform a variety of tasks, many child centered and many administrative, and I view my experiences as a volunteer as a positive one for myself, the teachers, and the students. I chose a study on volunteers because I feel they are a valuable resource and one that all teachers, especially beginning teachers, can view as an asset to their classroom.

So far, all of this experience was viewed through the eyes of a parent. I wanted to explore teacher attitudes and beliefs on how volunteers affected their classrooms. Does a volunteer add additional work to a teacher's classroom agenda? Is classroom behavior improved or worsened as a result of having an additional person in the classroom? Many questions came to mind.

While examining literature on this topic, I discovered that there is a national volunteer bureau. Typically these organizations remain separate, but are responsible for the recruitment, training, and placement

of volunteers into the school system. This sparked my interest in pursuing whether an organized system of volunteers would interest a small rural school that lacked such a system. Additionally, I chose a rural area because that is where my interest in teaching lies.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Over 30 years ago, California citizens organized what is recognized as one of the most successful volunteer programs in the United States. Over 2000 volunteers from the community of San Francisco are recruited and trained by coordinators of the program and placed in schools where they are needed. San Francisco School Volunteers estimate that their services were worth over two million dollars in 1987, and test scores indicate that the student are learning more in mathematics, reading, writing, and in special education areas as a result of volunteer services (Ferguson, 1988). Their roles range from one-on-one tutoring to developing volunteer programs in specific subjects.

The San Francisco program is organized by an advisory council whose job is to screen and train applicants and actively solicit businesses to arrange partnerships between the financial community and schools. Bob Hayden, of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, states that "a great value of this agency (the Volunteer Bureau) is to provided the goodwill that brings the private and public sectors together" (Ferguson ,1988, p. 36). Allowing business leaders to participate in classrooms provides mentors for students and shows the financial

community what students are learning in classrooms. It is just one method of linking volunteers with the school system.

There are many procedures for soliciting volunteers. One of the first that comes to mind is the volunteer him/herself; some volunteers just volunteer! S/he may have a child in the school or may just have a few hours to spare, but the reasons for volunteering are usually the same: to make a difference in the educational system. The next person one generally thinks about is the teacher. Many teachers, such as Tina Arrit at Greene County Primary School in Stanardsville, Virginia, send letters home with their students during the first week of school (T. Arrit, personal communication, April 8, 1994). Her letter states general needs that can be met by having the parents and guardians volunteer in her classroom. Another method of encouraging volunteers is through the use of an established volunteer agency. Sometimes this is operated under the auspices of a Parent-Teacher Organization or a Volunteer Bureau.

The biggest difference between all of the above is that if an agency is used, the recruiting, training, and placement of volunteers is generally the responsibility of the agency. The teacher places a request for a volunteer and the agency responds with someone who is trained in that area. This can save valuable time for the teacher because now s/he does not have to explain classroom rules, and the volunteer already

knows what is expected on him/her. Whichever method a school system chooses, it is important to "never exclude any groups or individuals point of view," as defined by Nathaniel Potts, a coordinator of Newark, New Jersey's 1974 program (Carter, 1974, p. 47). All ideas should be appreciated, if not exercised.

In 1956 the National School Volunteer Program (NSVP) was formed in the New York City Schools. Their philosophy reflected "the idea that if people desire to donate their time, then some place in the volunteer structure should be found to involve them" (Tierce and Seelbach, 1987, p. 36). The NSVP drafted a set of objectives that many school system have chosen to adopt in whole or in part. These objectives still apply, almost 40 years later. They are:

1. "To relieve the professional staff of non-teaching duties."
2. "To provide needed services to individual children to supplement the work of the classroom teacher."
3. "To enrich the experiences of children beyond what is available in school."
4. "To build better understanding of school problems among citizens and to stimulate widespread citizen support for public education" (Carter and Dapper, 1974, p. 52).

Using this philosophy, people everywhere have been able to volunteer in the classroom in many capacities.

With these objectives in mind, there are many types of volunteers that arrive in the classroom. Tierce and Seelbach, in a 1987 survey, cite Johnson and Williamson as noting that women, who have traditionally been the core volunteers in school systems, are decreasing their hours of volunteer service as they join the work force in increasing numbers (Tierce and Seelbach, 1987, p. 36). This forces schools nationwide to alter their search for volunteers away from parents in general and into the community at large. School volunteers many be found in the business community, among colleges and universities, among fellow school students (peers), as well as parents and guardians. A volunteer may be someone who is able to take part on a regular basis, such as weekly, or it may be someone who is able to participate on an intermittent basis, such as organizing a class party or career day.

Volunteers are used in many capacities, and it is difficult to place a total dollar value on their support because of regional and individual differences. In the fall of 1987 it was estimated that 1.3 million people volunteered in United States Schools, and the the schools that they participated in realize their worth (Michael, 1990).

In a survey undertaken in 1985, approximately 60% of elementary schools nationwide were able to adopt the use of volunteers. The participation varied among schools. Forty percent of schools with

enrollments with fewer than 150 students did not have any volunteers, and the remaining 60% reported an average of seven volunteers. Schools with enrollments of more than 500 students averaged a 75% participation rate with at least one volunteer. These school averaged close to 30 volunteers per school (Michael, 1990).

There were also wide variations among those schools with large populations of minority students. Public schools with a minority population of 50% or more were 50% less likely to have volunteers at all and the remaining 50% averaged only 15 per school (Michael, 1990). One possible explanation for these variations is the economic status of the residents in the areas surrounding the schools. Minority enrollments generally increase in areas where the resident's income has decreased.

Rural areas and small towns averaged fewer than 20 volunteers per school, while suburban school averaged more that 32 (Michael, 1990). Again, it stands to reason that socioeconomic factors are the basis for the decreased number of volunteers.

The benefits of having using volunteers in the classroom are widespread. Academic achievement appears to increase when volunteers are successfully placed. A three year study ending in 1987 by Armstrong and Crowe followed a group of student volunteers in teacher education programs. They cited trained volunteers as the "critical

ingredient" in the successful implementation of cooperative learning programs (Michael, 1990, p. 37). The use of volunteers allowed the teachers to introduce additional manipulatives that improved students computation skills. Another 1987 study by Armstrong and Crowe studied San Francisco volunteer and teacher teams that were part of an immigrant literacy program. They discovered that teams that remained in place for an entire year made "greater gains" that those that were only in place for one half of the year. Gains were recorded in basic language arts skills and improved student attitudes toward reading (Michael, 1990, p. 34).

Researchers in Dade County, Florida recorded gains in reading of as much as one year when trained volunteer tutors assisted 236 fifth and sixth graders in that subject. Students without tutors recorded gains of only one third year (Michael, 1990, p. 33). In 1980 Dade County Public Schools studied their peer tutoring program where students in grade one through six were tutored by seventh through ninth graders. Students in classrooms with the peer tutors recorded increased scores on standardized tests than those classrooms without peer tutors (Michael, 1990, p. 33).

Research has also been conduct on volunteer use in mainstreamed classrooms. Bernard Michael cites Cuningham and

Mulligan's 1979 study of volunteers successfully increasing academic achievement and confidence skills in mildly handicapped students. Dyslexic students were discovered to "achieve significant academic gains" (Michael, 1990, p. 35).

The benefits of volunteerism extend beyond the classroom. Parents as volunteers in the classroom prove parental involvement in their child's education. Recruiting volunteers from the financial community strengthens school-community relationships. A better understanding bears results as a better informed public becomes aware of particular problems a school system faces. A volunteer in the Denver Public Schools states that some benefits are difficult to measure, but, "the satisfaction of seeing the happiness of a child who discovers, perhaps for the first time, the taste of success and the joy of relating to a friendly, sympathetic adult who gives him exclusive attention," makes it all worthwhile (National School Public Relations Association, 1973, p. 8).

The school that this study will focus on is in a rural area of central Virginia that is experiencing a rapid rate of growth. Allendale Primary School (pseudonym) contains 570 students from kindergarten to grade two, and is roughly six percent minority.

There is no organized volunteer organization available. The teachers are responsible for recruiting, training, and placing their own

volunteers. To obtain the information necessary for my research, I designed a survey that was administered to the entire staff, including teachers and specialists, office and cafeteria managers, and the principal, who were employed at Allendale Primary School. My hypothesis is that this school will have an above average number of volunteers, based on its low minority rate and increasing rate of growth.

CHAPTER III

The Survey

Sample

For this study, the term "volunteer" refers to anyone who works within a school system without receiving any pay for services from that school system. Typically, this person works under the supervision of school personnel to augment school objectives. This includes, but is not limited to, working directly with students, performing clerical tasks, and assisting school personnel other than teachers.

Allendale Primary School is a small rural county in central Virginia with a county population of approximately 11, 500. From 1992-1993 the school age population increased approximately 9%. Last year the population increased 7%. It consists of 16 specialists, 27 teachers, 27 teacher assistants, and various office and cafeteria personnel. I asked for and received permission from the principal to conduct the survey. The survey was administered to a total of 45 people.

The Instrument

The survey (see Appendix A) is designed to determine the effect resulting from the use of volunteers in the classrooms. I am interested in confirming that capitalizing on volunteer use positively affects the

education of students by allowing for increased instructional time and positive classroom behavior.

The survey is specifically looking for the following information:

1. If the teacher would like an organized volunteer program.
2. If the teacher has at least one volunteer in the classroom. If the teacher does not have a volunteer, would s/he use one if available.
3. Who the volunteers are.
4. How the volunteers are used in the classroom.
5. The effect of volunteer use on teacher planning time.
6. The effect of volunteer use on instructional time pertaining to individual students or small groups.
7. The effect of volunteer use on total instructional time.
8. The effect of volunteer use on class behavior.

For this study, I separated the responsibilities of the volunteers into the following activities:

1. Activities involving tutoring or small groups.
2. Activities involving instructional support (grading papers, copying, bulletin boards).
3. Activities involving clerical support (library and office help).
4. Activities involving occasional help (field trips, career day).
5. Activities involving enrichment activities (whole group activities such as reading or art activities).

Response

The survey was administered directly to the classroom teachers. The staff was given three days to respond to the survey. It took approximately five minutes to complete. Eighty nine percent of the classroom teachers responded and 59% of the specialists responded for a school wide response of 78%. Of special note is that the vast majority of the specialists surveys were placed in their mailboxes and not requested through direct contact, so this might explain a smaller rate of return for the specialists. No teacher assistants were surveyed.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Results

Overall 69% of Allendale Primary School utilizes at least one volunteer in some capacity. Eighty eight percent of the school would like to see an organized volunteer program.

Ninety one percent of the teachers and 25% of the specialists have at least one volunteer. Of those staff members who did not have a volunteer, 50% of the teachers and 17% of the specialists would like to have one available. Of special interest is that 12% of Allendale's volunteers volunteered without being asked!

Fifty eight volunteers donate their time to Allendale Primary School. Thirty eight of these volunteers are at the school on a weekly basis. These 38 people average almost 112 hours per week striving to better the education of Allendale students. Ninety percent of these volunteers are parents, five percent are relatives, four percent are senior citizens or retirees, and one percent are other.

In order of utilization, the majority of the teacher have volunteers that participate occasionally. These volunteers are able to take part in chaperoning trips, in career days, or other activities that are not a part of the regular routine. Next, volunteers are widely used as tutors. They work on a one-to-one basis, or with small groups. Enrichment activities

compose the next largest group of volunteer usage. These volunteers may be working with whole group activities, such as reading stories, art activities, or with similar ventures. Volunteers as instructional support is the next area. These volunteers may be found grading papers, creating classroom materials, or performing odd jobs around the classroom. Clerical support, composing of library aides, office help, or cafeteria help, or bus duty personnel, is the least utilized area.

In general, 52% of the staff felt that having a volunteer increases planning time. Sixteen percent felt that planning time is decreased, and 32% felt that there is no effect. Separated further between teachers and specials this results in 50% of the teachers and 18% of the specialists perceiving an increase in planning time. Thirty two percent of the teachers and 33% of the specialists generalize that there is no effect on their planning time.

Overall, 76% of the respondants feel that having a volunteer increases instructional time; 4% feel there is a decrease and 20% feel there is no effect on instructional time. This results in 72% of the teachers and 100% of the specialists reporting a perceived increase in instructional time.

Eight percent of the surveyed group feel there is a decreased amount of individual time allotted to their students when a volunteer is

present. Twenty percent perceive that the same amount of time is focused on their students. Eighty six percent of the teachers and 100% of the specialists feel that having a volunteer increases the amount of individual time spent with students.

In general 83% of those responding feel that having a volunteer results in a positive effect on classroom behavior. Four percent perceive a negative effect and 13% feel there is no effect. In analysis, this results in 81% of the teachers and 100% of the specialists expressing the belief that using a volunteer is produces a positive effect on classroom behavior.

CHAPTER V

Summary

One hundred percent is a very impressive percentage! The results of this survey find the smallest numbers of volunteers in areas dealing with special education, yet it is in this area that 100% respond with increased instructional time and more positive classroom behavior as a result of having a volunteer in the classroom. These are very powerful numbers, but need to be carefully addressed. One specialists comments that (see Appendix B for additional comments), "Volunteers in special education are needed but tough because of confidentiality." and another offered "Sometimes the students come and go so quickly that it is difficult to find someone regularly." Perhaps this is especially true of Allendale where the majority of volunteers are parents!

The majority of teachers and specialists at Allendale Primary School view volunteers in a positive manner. "I have enjoyed working with my PVA's (parent volunteer assistants)" and "They help reinforce skills and make it possible to do more activities with the children," are two of many comments that compliment volunteers. "It is easy to get side-tracked talking about the PVA's child or school related issues" is one of few negative comments that are addressed.

Conclusions

I feel, that while Allendale Primary School has a successful volunteer program, there are areas, particularly in special education classrooms, that would benefit from an organized program. This would allow all teachers and specialists to have volunteers available for their classrooms. Volunteers would arrive in the classrooms trained and ready to perform specified duties. This would alleviate many concerns, including issues surrounding confidentiality and the presence of preschool children, that the survey uncovered. A volunteer coordinator would benefit volunteers by providing specialized positions and through the training that would be provided for all volunteers.

Allendale Primary School has an above average number of volunteers as I expected. Their volunteers are predominantly parents. There is no college or university around from which to draw volunteers. There is a nursing facility nearby which possibly could be explored for senior citizen and retiree volunteers. One percent of the staff is using students as peer tutors.

I expected an increase in planning time, as was the situation, particularly since there was an increase in the amount of instructional time when a volunteer was present. In general, 52% of the teachers stated that there was increased planning time when using volunteer

services, while 76% perceived an increase in instructional time. As previously stated the number of teachers and specialists that stated an increase in positive behavior is worth investigating further. Teachers and specialists spend a tremendous amount of time regarding classroom management, and fewer discipline problems should result in increased instructional time. This study did not examine the use of academic achievement and the use of volunteers.

There are several items to contemplate when considering the results of this survey. First, and foremost, the number of teachers and specialists surveyed is a relatively small number. Of that number, 22% did not complete the survey. The numbers could have surely changed had the participation rate been higher. I hypothesize that there would have continued to be increased planning time, increased instructional time, and a continued positive change in classroom behavior resulting from the use of volunteers.

There is a high percentage of parents participating as volunteers at Allendale Primary School. This could change in an urban area or an area that has access to college or university students. As the demographics of volunteers change this could alter the results regarding the status of how these volunteers used their time and talents.

I feel that there is a need to further study the implications of

increased instructional time and more positive classroom behavior and the use of classroom volunteers. Based on my research, volunteer usage has an overall positive effect.

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Appendix A

School Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is part of a study on volunteers in a rural Primary School. Thank you very much for participating. Circle the answer where appropriate or fill in the blank with the number requested.

1. Does your school have an organized volunteer program?
   YES NO
   If not, would you like to see an organized volunteer program?
   YES NO

2. Do you use volunteers in your classroom?
   YES NO
   If your answer is NO, would you use volunteers if they were available? **YES NO**
   If you answered NO, you do not have to answer the remainder of the questions.

3. If you have volunteers, who is responsible for training them?
   TEACHER VOLUNTEER TRAINING COORDINATOR
   PRINCIPAL OTHER (please explain)
   _____

4. Who are your volunteers? How many are.....?
   PARENTS_____ **RELATIVES**_____
   SENIOR CITIZENS or RETIREES_____
   BUSINESS COMMUNITY_____
   COLLEGE STUDENTS_____
   OTHER (please explain)
   _____

5. How many volunteers participate in your classroom per week?_____
   Approximately how many hours per week do volunteers participate in your classroom?___

How many volunteers volunteered without being asked?_____

6. How many volunteers do you use in the following capacities?
NOTE: some volunteers many be used in more than one way
Tutors (one-on-one or small group activities)_____
Instructional Support (grading, creating materials, etc.)_____
Occasional Activities (chaperoning trips, career days, etc.)_____
Enrichment Activities (whole group activities such as reading stories, art activities, etc.)_____
Clerical Support (library aides, office help, cafeteria or bus duty)___

7. Do you feel that having a volunteer **INCREASES/DECREASES/HAS NO EFFECT ON** your planning time?_____

8. Do you feel that having a volunteer **INCREASES/DECREASES/HAS NO EFFECT ON** your instructional time?

9. In general, do you feel that having a volunteer has resulted in **MORE/LESS/the SAME** amount of individual work with students or small groups of students?

10. In general, do you feel that having a volunteer has a **POSITIVE/NEGATIVE/NO** effect on the behavior in your classroom?

Please write any additional comments on the back of this form. Thank you!

Appendix B

Teacher Comments

"I usually use my PVA's for playing games, centers with the children or art activities (all in small groups). If it's an involved art activity, we may do it whole group together.

"I have enjoyed working with my PVA's and it does help more with instructional time."

"Volunteers in special education are needed but tough because of confidentiality."

"It is easy to get side-tracked talking about the PVA's child, or school related issues."

"Some volunteers are more independent than others."

"Volunteers are great!"

"In some cases, over the years, the children have acted up more or especially the volunteer's child will 'act out' more than usual."

"I really feel a more organized-objectively trained program would help greatly."

"I have had older students come to read/work with first graders. It was a successful experience for both grade levels."

"The only time I have a volunteer is when I'm doing the Christmas

program. Many of the questions don't apply."

"I love PVA's!"